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THE ROUND TABLE

AN EXPERIMENT IN SENIOR ENGLISH

The Trenton, N.J., High School does not claim to be exempt from the current criticism made on the part of business and professional men that high-school graduates cannot spell, write coherent sentences, and develop their ideas logically, and, *in toto*, have few ideas worth expression. To quiet this criticism and to provide a medium of composition work which from its *modus operandi* would secure these things by its peculiar appeal to the students, the writer conceived the following plan of work. He is happy to report that it is working, and he passes it on to any other benighted teachers of English who can see in it any merit or availability for their conditions.

For several years the work of composition in our school has been grouped on this plan: first-year work covers letter-writing, elementary composition in the four forms of discourse, and a measure of oral expression along the same line, interspersed with judicious exercises in sentence structure; second-year work is devoted almost wholly to the systematic study of the paragraph, with an extension of applicable sentence study, spelling, and word analysis; third-year teaching covers entire the matter of description and narration in more enlarged forms, coupled with a study of figures of speech and versification. This arrangement leaves open for the Senior year the subjects of exposition and argument. Until recent years these subjects have been treated in the conventional way. In exposition the details of definition, classification, arrangement, and the rest were first covered, and then themes appropriate worked out, increasing in length until the conventional "long themes" were reached. In argumentation, matters of argument from fact, theory, policy, and principle, inductive and deductive reasoning, the brief, refutation, persuasion, and the whole chain of technicalities were plowed through. When the pupil was loaded up, he was thought fit to begin writing argumentative themes, winding up the whole year with a spell of "long themes" again, culminating at the end of the year with a grand "commencement theme."

We have gotten over this. When a pupil reaches the Senior year he has a reasonable idea of the varieties of paragraph forms required to write effectively in the four forms of discourse. What more is required? "Long themes" are but a succession of paragraphs plus logical connec-

tion. Therefore the opening months of the Senior year are given to a brief review of the paragraph forms needed for exposition and argument, and only the necessary time is spent on outline work for long themes, with a few assigned. The pupils are then ready for the "scheme."

The teachers of Senior divisions divide the pupils up into committees of either three or four pupils each, labeled as follows: Department of Politics, Business, Science, Literature, Education, Fiction, Social Life, Nature, Civics, and Comment. But the greatest of these is Comment. The pupils serve in these departments for one month; then the teacher makes a new classification, based both on the pupils's preference and the rule that, if possible, each pupil shall serve once in as many different departments as conditions will permit. These departments correspond with the departments of a magazine devoted to reviewing what is going on in the world, of which "Current Literature" is a good type. It is the business of the members of each department to confer, under the direction of the editorial department—the Department of Comment—supervised constantly, of course, by the teacher in charge, choose the best representative topic covering events of that month, read as much as possible on this subject in the newspapers, magazines, and late books, and prepare a theme varying from three to five pages thereon. These themes are gathered in by the general editors, read, and returned for rewriting—the teacher acting as arbiter in doubtful matters—and handed to the teacher for final scrutiny. If the themes need rewriting, this work is then done in ink, typewritten when possible both by the pupils and the typewriting department, and returned to the teacher by a certain time. Two recitation periods are then given to reading aloud and discussing these themes, as to both form and substance. Additional oral information and comment is expected, and "the meeting" intended to be informing and stimulative. The work, of course, in its final form, must be indorsed in a required way, pages numbered, etc., and a bibliography of articles and books stated. We call our "effort" the "Fortnightly Review." When each "issue" is "out," it is clamped together and placed in a conspicuous place for reference and admiration!

For the first two or three issues the teachers arranged all departments and assigned all topics, in many instances referring pupils to definite articles and books. But it is the other way around, now. The pupils take the initiative—a most desirable asset of youth—and inform the teacher of the subject chosen, and the place in which information can be secured. It stands to reason that the teachers have to be wide-awake, and, if they have not read the books and articles in question, they must

necessarily be sufficiently informed on the matter to know whether the topic is suitable, timely, or adequate in information. The Department of Politics allows for original articles on presidential candidates, trust regulation, abstracts of current articles, and book reviews. The Department of Business covers its field in the same way, specializing on labor difficulties. The Department of Science offers excellent opportunities for reviewing the work of such men as Edison, Tesla, Mme. Curie, etc., and for many notes of the latest achievements in that field. The Department of Literature is popular, for it permits of book reviews, musical and dramatic criticism, and original articles on the ways and work of contemporary writers. The Department of Education is wide in scope. It covers everything from local school problems to the Hague Conference or religious propaganda. The Department of Social Life makes a specialty of women's work, the suffrage movement, and the things of domestic economy and community welfare. The Department of Fiction calls in each issue for an original short story, a descriptive sketch, and a poem. The Department of Nature could properly be called "Out-of-Doors." It covers a range from athletics to weather prognostications. The Department of Civics is a lively member. We have civics taught very effectively in our school. Trenton is the state capital, and we have just adopted commission government. Moreover, we are in the throes of installing better water conditions, enlarging the river front, beautifying the streets, enlarging the parks, building a sewage disposal plant, etc. All this gives much material for use. The Department of Comment must write editorials on editorial topics, and in an editorial way, which condition means close study of the papers and magazines for topics and style. Each member also must supervise a certain number of the other departments and take charge of the matter of getting them in on time. The editor-in-chief has his quota of this work and general direction of the other members of his department. It may be said that two recitations of the week previous to the week of issue are given to work in class to enable the teacher to go over the outlines of the themes which each pupil must prepare by that time, and to make suggestions or extend any help in the composition of the work. The city librarian is enlisted in this task. He sends to the school each month a list of all the leading articles in the magazines on file, bulletins of new books received, and places them on a reserve shelf in the library for our use. The teachers also keep on file on the bulletin board any interesting matter they can find, and current numbers of what magazines they take and can secure, including daily copies of local papers and the

New York Times, *New York Sun*, the *London Weekly Times*, and the *Congressional Record*.

The following is a sample list of the topics recently treated, given in the order of their respective departments: "Taft's Administration," "The English Insurance Bill," "Socialism in Germany," "Roosevelt on the Panama Canal," "Russia and China," "The Minimum Wage," "The Aldrich Report," "The Work of Madame Curie," "The Sense and Nonsense of Christian Science," "The Progress of Aviation," "Antarctic Exploration," "The American Drama," "The Work of Selma Lagerlöf," "Charles Dickens," "Oscar Hammerstein," "Trenton's Educational Needs," "Uniformity of Educational Standards," "Vocational Training," "The Misfit Child," "The Country School Problem," "The Conservation of Motherhood," "Sensible Dress for Women," "Motion Pictures," "The Evils of the Popular Song," "Schoolhouse Social Centers," "Back to the Farm," "The Work of Jane Addams," "Landscape Gardening," "Sleeping Out-of-Doors," "The Slaughter of the Egret," "Draining the Everglades," "Commission Government," "Trenton's Water Supply," "The Public-Service Corporation," "Local Option," "The Trenton Immigrant," "The New Washington." Samples of editorial topics written upon are: "The High-School Senior," "Graft," "John Bigelow," "High-School Ethics," "Presidential Primaries," "The Decline of Manners," "The Money Trust," "Roosevelt's 'Crime'," "Schools for the Study of Journalism," "The Arbitration Treaty."

From the work done so far in this "experiment," we believe we have attained for the pupil a measure of these four things: initiative, or the ability to think and act for oneself, plus self-reliance; greater breadth and accuracy of knowledge about affairs on which high-school graduates are expected to have some opinions; greater interest in oral and written composition in school work; better form in that expression.

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To the Editor of the "English Journal":

Your request for a copy of the inclosed translation¹ was made known to me by Miss Stickney of our English department. It is with great pleasure that I send it to you.

¹ It is hoped that the publication of the translation may call forth discussion of the value of such exercises as training in English, and also additional examples of good work.—EDITOR.